

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002891

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2015

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [GR](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: AEGEAN: TURKEY MULLS NO LONGER FILING FLIGHT
INFORMATION WITH NATO

REF: A. ANKARA 2730

[B](#). ANKARA 1900

[C](#). ATHENS 1068

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Turkey is considering ceasing filing flight information with NATO for military flights over the Aegean, an MFA official told us May 20. TGS contacts confirm this. Mounting Turkish frustration with Greece's public relations and diplomatic efforts to paint the Turks as aggressors--along with what Turkey views as a lack of reciprocal confidence building measures from Athens--are making it difficult for Turkey "to sustain" its filing policy. We believe the Turkish Air Force is probably also feeling bottom-up pressure from pilots because Greek pilots are forewarned of their entry to the air over the Aegean and thus have an advantage in mock dogfights. Additionally, both military and civilian Turks are increasingly angry with both Greece and the EU overall. If Greece cannot make a minimal gesture to reduce tensions, we believe the Turks will before too long pull the plug on its filing policy, despite the consequences. End summary.

NATO Filings: Advantage, Greece

[1](#)2. (C/NF) PolMilCouns and PolMilOff called on MFA Deputy Director General for Maritime and Aviation Affairs Vakur Gokdenizler on May 20 to discuss Aegean issues. Gokdenizler briefly reviewed the GOT's long-standing position on its dispute with Greece on the Aegean, then moved quickly to the issue of filing flight information with NATO. Since 2001, the Turkish military has filed daily flight schedules (DFS) with NATO, including the date and time of the flight, number of aircraft, and the general area of entry into the Athens flight information region (FIR). Gokdenizler pointed out that there are only four general corridors of entry, meaning that the Hellenic Air Force knows where Turkish flights are entering at all times.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Gokdenizler reported that "there is serious disagreement" within the GOT on whether this practice "can be sustained." (NOTE: TGS J-5 Greece/Cyprus Chief RADM Sislioglu had told PolMilCouns May 11 that the Turkish military was considering no longer filing flight information with NATO, but that he anticipated MFA would oppose such a move (ref a). END NOTE.) There is increasing frustration among many in the GOT that Turkey took this CBM in 2001 but that Greece, in Turkey's view, has done nothing in return. He cited continuing Greek diplomatic pressure within the EU and as far afield as South Africa, wherein Greek diplomats try to convince sometimes non-savvy interlocutors that Turkey is routinely violating sovereign Greek airspace. He also noted that the Turkish Air Force--from the pilots on up the chain--is frustrated because the Greek pilots know exactly when and where Turkish planes are entering the FIR, giving the Greek pilots an unfair advantage in mock dogfights. Gokdenizler implied that the GOT was not ready to take this decision immediately, but that it might in the non-too-distant future absent any gesture from Greece. "It is not possible to sustain this forever," he said.

Weary of Date-Driven Diplomacy

[1](#)4. (C/NF) Gokdenizler reported that in fact the GOT has been mulling making this move for the past two years, but that "there is always another date" looming where doing so could damage Turkey's image: first the 2004 Greek elections, then the Cyprus referendum, then the 2004 Summer Olympics, then the Dec. 17, 2004 EU decision on whether to begin accession talks with Turkey, and now Oct. 3 of this year, when the EU talks are scheduled to begin. Gokdenizler implied that Turkish policymakers see no end to such key dates, but that they may soon be ready to risk the fallout ending the schedule filing might make anyway.

PolMilCouns to Turks: Think Carefully

15. (C/NF) PolMilCouns responded that Turkey should think carefully before it withdraws a CBM such as this one unilaterally. The Greeks do not appear to have deviated substantively from their Aegean policy and practices for at least the past decade. The United States agrees that "FIR violations" by state aircraft are a Greek myth, and that the Greek claim of four additional nautical miles of national airspace beyond its six NM of territorial waters is groundless. Yet for Turkey to cease filing flight information with NATO at this time will only serve to give the Greeks ammunition in their diplomatic and public relations efforts to paint Turkey as a sinister force in the international community. Turkey recently worked hard and successfully to improve its image, for example on Cyprus, but to take a step backward now when the Greeks have not done so could help undo all this work.

16. (C/NF) Moreover, PolMilCouns pointed out, while the current status quo may be an annoyance to Turkey, ceasing to file plans could increase the odds of an accident. If the Greeks no longer know when and where the Turks are coming, they will have to scramble jets and otherwise act with more haste and urgency than now. If the Greeks try to hurry in order to intercept Turkish planes before they leave the Athens FIR, for example, this might create a riskier environment.

What Can Athens Do?

17. (C/NF) Gokdenizler took these points, and noted two possible Greek courses of action which he believed would head off Turkey ceasing to file flight information:

--The Greeks could cease tagging Turkish planes as "x-rays" (or enemies), and/or
--Greece could stop intercepting flights entering the Athens FIR, even if the Greeks were to continue to intercept Turkish plans within 10 NM of Greek territory.

These or some other step by Greece could strengthen the hand of those in the GOT who support continuing flight schedule filing. He asked if the U.S. would be willing to discuss this issue in general terms (not disclosing Turkish policy thinking) with the Greeks and seek "a single goodwill gesture" from them. PolMilCouns was non-committal. Gokdenizler would not say whether Turkey has raised this yet directly with the Greeks, stating it was too early in the Turkish decision-making process on DFS. (NOTE: Even if Turkey ceases to file DFS, Gokdenizler said TAF planes would still signal their presence ("squawk IFF") to the Greeks upon entering the Athens FIR. END NOTE.)

Comment: Saving Ankara from Itself?

18. (C/NF) Gokdenizler could not provide a comprehensive answer when we asked why Turkey might now feel it necessary to cease filing flight information with NATO. We believe, however, that the frustration he cited goes both up and down the Turkish civilian and military chains of command. Turkish Air Force (TAF) pilots are probably tired of Greek pilots always having the upper hand because they know ahead of time when and where TAF planes will enter the Athens FIR; this likely increases grassroots pressure on TAF commanders. Additionally, senior Turks are angry at Greece and the entire European Union for a variety of reasons: the EU has been wrapped around the axle in providing trade and aid for the Turkish Cypriots despite its promises to do so after the failed April 2004 Cyprus referendum, Turkey senses increasing European unwillingness to accept Turkey as a full member, and the recent European Court of Human Rights' recent decision that the Abdullah Ocalan trial was unfair has only raised the heat more. With nationalism and anti-EU sentiment on the rise, it is harder for Turkish policymakers to sustain what they perceive as an unrequited CBM in the Aegean.

19. (C/NF) The question is: What do we do about it, if anything? Gokdenizler made it plain, however, that he hopes the Greeks could make a gesture--no matter how small--to strengthen his hand in lowering Turkish frustration and pulling back from not filing with NATO. We plan to continue quietly urging the Turks not to take a unilateral step backwards, but absent a gesture from Greece expect Turkish policymakers will make a regrettable decision.

EDELMAN